LESSON-9

POWER OF THE SPOKEN WORD

THIS CHAPTER Will HELP YOU

Understand the power of words.
Express your thoughts clearly, simply, and correctly.
Bring your ideas to life through powerful images.
Use symbols to bring listeners together.
Choose words that move an audience to action.

We often underestimate the power of our own speech. The phrase “mere words” implies that language itself is without real consequence. Yet, as our opening example shows, language can be both deceptive and richly expressive - and at the same time! The wording of a speech can evade questions as it seems to answer them. But as the Roman critic quoted at the head of this chapter reminds us, *when words work ethically as well as effectively, they bring home to listeners the reality and truth of a situation.*

As speakers, we must make many important decisions. We must plan how to overcome fear, suspicion, indifference, and cultural stereotypes. We must decide on a structure for our speeches and select appropriate supporting materials. When speaking on controversial subjects, we must choose the most compelling arguments to advance our position. These decisions make public speaking a fascinating art to practice. However, our understanding of this art is incomplete if we leave out the countless decisions we must make as we fashion the words of our message. The language we select may determine whether our speech succeeds or fails.

This brings us to a third basic metaphor for the skills of public speaking. First, you learn how *to climb* the barriers that separate speakers and listeners. Second, you learn how *to build* the structure of a message. Finally, you learn how *to weave* a fabric of words that expresses your message with clarity, power, and beauty so that listeners will understand and remember what you say and relate it to their lives.

The words you speak are your immediate point of contact with listenef5. This chapter describes what oral language can do for you, shows you how to use powerful language techniques, and suggests standards you should follow as you weave the language of your message.

THE POWER OF THE SPOKEN WORD

Our grasp of the power of the spoken word must begin with understand the differences between oral and written language. One of the most striking differences is that oral language is more spontaneous and less formal than written language. For example, instead of saying, “Eight thousand, three hundred twenty-three cases of measles have been reported in Shelby County,” you might say, “More than eight thousand cases of measles have been reported in Shelby County!”. It’s not really important that listeners remember the exact number of cases - it *is* important that they see the magnitude of the problem. Rounding off numbers helps you make this point emphatically.

Oral language is also more colorful and intense than written language. Sentence fragments and slang expressions are more acceptable in speeches than in essays. Oral language also is more interactive. It depends on audience involvement for its effectiveness. Consider the following quotation' from a speech:

You want to know what we're going to do? I'll tell you what we're not going to do. We're *not* going to play along. This is a rule that deserves to be broken. Yes, broken! And we're going to do the breaking.
This brief example illustrates many of the spontaneous, informal, intense, fragmentary, and interactive qualities of oral language. The speaker is keenly aware of her audience. Her words reflect the quality of expanded conversation we discussed in Chapter!. Moreover, in oral communication, pauses, vocal emphasis, and vocal variations act as punctuation marks to clarify and underscore meaning. Such resources are not available to written communication.

In oral communication time considerations are extremely important. Jerry Tarver, professor of speech communication at the University of Richmond, emphasizes three significant time differences between spoken and written language.2 First, he offers "Tarver's Law of Conciseness: *It takes more words per square idea to say something than to write it."* Because listeners cannot reread a spoken statement, oral language must be simple and use more repetition. Examples and illustrations are especially important, because they amplify the speaker's point to make sure that listeners get the message.

Tarver's second time difference concerns the *order in which spoken thoughts develop in a sentence.* His example is excellent:

I recently read in a newspaper column a spirited defense of a public figure. The last line of the column was, "For that he should be congratulated, not chastised." Well and good. The reader gobbles up the line in an instant and digests the contrast between congratulations and chastisement. But when we speak the line we feed it to a listener morsel by morsel. And the last two words prove to be rather bland. We need to *hear* "For that he should not be chastised, he should be congratulated." More words; but more important, a different order. . . . In the slower pace of speech, individual words stand out more, and thus *time* accords a special emphasis to the last idea, the climactic idea in the sentence. As a rule, then, the stronger, more impressive idea should be saved or the end. And it will often be the case that the punch comes from a positive rather than a negative thought.3Tarver's advice to *build up* to your most important point within a sentence repeats a structural principle discussed in Chapter 7 - that the main points of a speech often work best when arranged in an order of ascending importance. Tarver's third effect of time is that lithe beat or flow or rhythm of the syllables is even more important in words written to be heard than in words written to be seen." While the effect is somewhat mysterious, spoken speech often beats on the senses like a drum. The rhythms of oral speech make the meanings of words stick in memory. The beat adds emotionality. Rhythm may also be paired with rhyme to make oral language even more memorable. During the O. J. Simpson murder trial, the prosecution asked Simpson to try on a glove allegedly worn by the killer during the crime. It was a high moment of the trial, but a low moment for the prosecution, when Simpson struggled to put the glove on. Who then can forget how defense attorney Johnny Cochran, in his summary to the jury, impressively intoned: "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit."

Nine features of Spoken Language

Spoken language is more personal.
Spoken language is less formal.
Spoken language uses less precise numbers.
Spoken language is more colorful and intense.
Spoken language uses shorter, more simple, even fragmentary sentences.
Spoken language is more repetitious.
Spoken language uses more examples and narratives.
Spoken language saves important points for the ends of sentence.
Spoken language emphasizes the rhythm of speech.

When skillfully used, the spoken word can reach others in ways that the written word cannot. There are four ways that effective oral language can help you influence the lives of listeners:

- by revealing subjects in certain ways,
- by arousing intense feelings about subjects,
- by bringing your listeners together, and
- by moving your audience to action.4

To be an effective and ethical speaker and listener, you must understand how these functions of language can be used or abused.

The Power to Make listeners See

Speakers and listeners often see subjects in different ways. The artful use of language, however, can close the gap that separates them. Consider, for example, the problem that confronted one of our students, Scott Champlin. As he prepared his self-introductory speech, Scott decided that the most distinctive thing about him was an experience he had undergone in the military. His challenge was deciding how he could share that experience, so that others might understand what it meant to him. One option would be to simply describe the experience matter-of-factly:

**While I was parachuting into Panama as part of Operation “Just Cause,”
I was wounded by a tracer bullet.**

The more he thought about that option, the less adequate it seemed. So he began to consider how his words might convey a sense of that experience to his listeners. His depiction of that experience allowed his audience to share his leap into that threatening night:

The darkness of two o’clock in the morning was multiply penetrated by streaks of red marking the paths of tracer rounds as they cut their way through the night. Suddenly, I felt a surge of heat knock me in the right leg with a force that spun me around like a twisted yo-yo at the end of a string.

Here the use of color contrast - between “darkness” and “streaks of red” - paints a vivid picture. Lively verbs such as “penetrated,” “cut,” “knock,” and “spun” fill the picture with action. A brief comparison - like a twisted yo-yo at the end of a string” - brings the

picture into sharp focus. Through his artful choice of words, Scott found the way to communicate the meaning of his message.

This power to shape how an audience sees something is especially important when your subject is unfamiliar or unusual. When listeners don't have a clear perception to compare with the speaker's depiction of a subject, they are quite vulnerable. In such cases, the speaker's words become windows that reveal a subject with startling clarity. The Renaissance scholar Francis Bacon suggested over four hundred years ago that the glass in such windows can be "enchanted." The perspective presented may be distorted by the speaker's interests and values. Words can color and alter subjects, allowing speakers to disguise or obscure reality. The power to make us see also can be a power that can blind. Thus, as critical listeners, we must guard against accepting any speaker's view as THE TRUTH of the matter.

The Power to Awaken Feelings

Language also can arouse intense feelings. It can touch our hearts and change our ways of thinking. Like the power to make people see, the power to make people feel can be used ethically or abused. It is most ethical when it *supplements* sound reasoning and credible evidence as it activates the proof by *pathos* we discuss in Chapter 14. It is abused when speakers *substitute* appeals to feelings for evidence or reasoning. To arouse feelings language must overcome the barriers of time, distance, and apathy.

Overcoming Time. Listeners live in the present. Therefore, it can be difficult to awaken feeling about events that lie in the remote past or distant future. Fortunately, the language of feeling has a time-machine quality. Speakers can use language skills to bring past and future events into the present and make them seem real.

In many businesses, employees and customers may lack a sense of identification with the company. They may feel that the atmosphere is impersonal and that no one cares about them or their problems. To combat that impression, narratives that recapture feelings from the past are often told at company meetings or used in advertisements. Such narratives help establish a sense of corporate heritage and culture. It is more pleasant to do business with a company that seems to have human qualities. Look how the words in the following story awaken feelings. Reconstructed from often told legend, these words capture the legend of Federal Express, a pioneer in overnight delivery:

You know, we take a lot for granted. It's hard to remember that Federal Express was once just a fly-by-night dream, a crazy idea in which a few people had invested - not just their time and their money, but their futures and lives. I remember one time early on when things weren't going so well. We were really up against it. Couldn't even make the payroll that week. It looked like we were going to crash. Fred [Smith, founder of the company] was in a deep funk. Never saw him quite like that before or since. "What the hell," he said, and flew off to Las Vegas The next day he flew back and his face was shining. "We're going to make it," he said. He had won $27,000 at the blackjack table! And we made it. We met the payroll. Shortly after that things turned around and Federal Express began to grow into the giant it is today.

5This story enlivens the past by emphasizing the contrast of emotions - the "deep funk" versus the "shining" face. "What the hell," and "We're going to make it," express

depression and confidence. Such use of dialogue to express feelings recreates the excitement and brings the scene into the present. In using the dialogue, the speaker steps back and gives Fred Smith center stage by letting him voice his own feelings. It would have been less effective if the speaker had simply stated: “Fred was depressed, but after he got back from Las Vegas he was confident.” Offering such a summary would have diluted the emotional strength of the scene.

Language can also make the future seem close at hand. Because language can cross the barrier of time, we are able to have both a sense of tradition and a vision of tomorrow to guide us through the present.

‘Overcoming Distance. The closer anything is to our lives, the easier it is to develop feelings about it. But what if speakers must discuss events that seem distant from their listeners’ interests? Language can telescope such subjects and bring them close. Consider how one student reduced the psychological distance between her urban audience and her rural subject through an interesting character and his meaning to her life. Her se of graphic language allows her audience to share her feelings and experiences:

James Johnson knows the loveliest, most sparkling springs in Perry County. He has lived all eighty-four years of his life there, and he taught me the most important things I know: why the mist rises on a lake at night, how to make the best blackberry jam you’ve ever tasted and how to take care of baby wild rabbits that are abandoned. Today, I want to tell you more about James - and about myself through him.

By focusing on the concrete details that helped the audience see the place she was describing - the mist, the blackberry jam, the baby wild rabbits the speaker conquered distance and aroused feelings about a subject that might otherwise have seemed remote.

Overcoming Apathy. We live in an age of communication overkill. Modern audiences have become jaded by an endless barrage of mass-mediated information, persuasion, and entertainment. The personal contact of public speaking, even when mediated, allows speakers to reach out to listeners and touch them with language. Jesse Jackson stirred the audience of the 1988 Democratic National Convention with the following message:

America’s not a blanket woven from one thread, one color, one cloth. When I was a child growing up in Greenville, South Carolina, and grandmother could not afford a blanket, she didn’t complain and we did not freeze. Instead, she took pieces of old cloth - patches, wool, silk, gabardine, crockersack on the patches - barely good enough to wipe off your shoes with.

But they didn’t stay that way very long. With sturdy hands and a strong cord, she sewed them together into a quilt, a thing of beauty and power and culture. Now, Democrats, we must build such a quilt. Farmers, you seek
fair prices and you are right, but you cannot stand alone. Your patch is not big enough. Workers, you fight for fair wages. You are right. But your patch, labor, is not big enough. Women, you seek comparable worth and pay equity. You are right. But your patch is not big enough. ‘Women, mothers, who seek Head Start and day care and pre-natal care on the front side of life, rather than jail care and welfare on the back side of life, you’re right, but your patch is not big enough. Students, you seek scholarships. You are right. But your patch is not big enough. Blacks and Hispanics, when we fight for civil rights, we are right, but our patch is not big enough. Gays and lesbians, when you fight against discrimination and [for] a cure for AIDS, you are right, but your patch is not big enough. Conservatives and progressives, when you fight for what you believe, right-wing, left-wing, hawk, dove you are right; from your point of view, but your point of view is not enough. But don’t despair. Be as wise as my grandmamma. Pool the patches

and the pieces together, bound by a common thread. When we form a great quilt of unity and common ground we'll have the power to bring about health care and housing and jobs and education and hope to our nation.6 Jackson's references to poverty and his grandmother's loving care aroused sympathetic feelings from many viewers. The image of a quilt - suggesting the warmth of home and the ability to create things of lasting value and beauty from humble materials - gave the audience a vision of unity to guide them. When artfully used, language can overcome the barriers of time, distance, and apathy to make us care about a subject.

The Power to Bring listeners Together :-

On many issues, individual action is not enough. In some cases it takes people acting together to bring about or resist change. Therefore, speakers must often remind listeners of the importance of their group memberships. The Jesse Jackson example, while it arouses strong feeling, also reminds listeners that they are part of an important larger group. The farmers, workers, women, students, gays and lesbians, conservatives and progressives all were *Democrats.* And only if they acted together - as Democrats rather than individual interest groups - would they have a chance to win the election. The quilt metaphor also invoked this sense of belonging to a larger group.

Just as language can unite people, it can also drive them apart. As we write, eight Republican presidential hopefuls are contending in the 1990 New Hampshire primary. During a nationally televised debate these men attacked and belittled each other, especially the frontrunners. The spectacle was not a happy one for the Republican party, for from this group must emerge a leader who can unify and energize the party. One candidate, Rep. Robert Dornan of California, reminded them that their attacks on each other, threatened party unity:

I wish the spirit of Ronald Reagan would descend on New Hampshire. . . and [I wish we could remember] his eleventh commandment, that no Republican should speak ill of another Republican. . . . We have to stop tearing at one another, and focus on what I said in Des Moines, Iowa. The target is Clinton [and] the moral crisis in the White House. . . . Gentlemen, we're a family here. let's unify ourselves and make sure we take the White House on November 5th.?

Note that as Dornan pleads for unity, he invokes a common hero, Ronald Reagan. He uses the "family" metaphor to invoke an ideal of togetherness. And he reminds listeners of a common enemy and a common goal- their desire to defeat President Clinton.

Heroes and enemies, common goals, shared values, and metaphors of inclusion work together to heighten the value of group membership. We discuss these techniques more closely later in this chapter.

The Power to Encourage Action

Even if your audience members share an identity, they still may not be ready to act. What might stand in their way? For one-thing, they may not be convinced of the soundness of your proposal. Even if they are, they might hesitate. Listeners may not believe they can do anything about a problem. Action requires energy, commitment, and risk.

Your words must convince your listeners that action is necessary and success is possible. Look at how Anna Aley, whose speech is printed at the end of Chapter 13, dealt with these challenges. Anna wanted her audience to help improve off-campus housing conditions for students at Kansas State University. In her speech, Anna used personal

experience combined with factual information to paint vivid word-pictures of deplorable and dangerous off-campus housing. She also reminded listeners of their group membership - that they were all students, responsible for each other's welfare:

…….What can one student do to change the practices of numerous Manhattan landlords? Nothing, if that student is alone. But just think of what we could accomplish if we got all 13,600 off-campus students involved in this issue! Think what *We* could accomplish if we got even a fraction of those students involved!

Anna then offered specific proposals that her listeners might support proposals that did not call for great energy or risk on their part; in short. she made commitment as easy as possible. Finally, she concluded with a rousing appeal to action:

Kansas State students have been putting up with substandard living conditions for too long. It's time we finally got together to do something about this problem. Join the Off-Campus Association. Sign my petition. Let's send a message to these slumlords that we're not going to put up with this any more. We don't have to live in slums.

Anna's words expressed both her indignation and the urgency of the problem. Her references to time - "too long" and "it's time" - called for immediate action. Her final appeals to join the association and sign the petition were expressed in short sentences that packed a lot of punch an.: encouraged the impulse to action. Her repetition of "slumlords" and "slums" motivated her listeners to transform their indignation into action.

Anna also illustrated another strategy important to the language of action. You must be able to depict real-life dramas that reveal what is at stake and challenge listeners to take on certain roles.8 Such scenarios draw clear lines between right and wrong. In the words of an early union organizing song, the audience may be asked, "Which side are you on?"9

Be careful, however, not to go overboard with such techniques. When you script a drama, maintain respect for the humanity of those involved in conflict. As both a speaker and a listener, be wary of melodramas that contrast unblemished virtue with absolute evil. Such depictions usually distort reality and call your trustworthiness into question.

The power of language is great, ranging from shaping perceptions to inciting action. How can you harness this power in ways that are both ethical and elevating? We have already pointed out some of the ways as we illustrated the power of words. Now we cover these special techniques in more detail.

USING LANGUAGE RESOURCES

How can you weave powerful language into the fabric of your message? In this section we consider some of the special techniques you can use to help listeners share your perceptions and feelings, connect with you and with each other, and take appropriate action.

Resources that Shape Audience Perceptions

You can close the perceptual gap between yourself and listeners by using techniques that help you make abstract subjects more concrete or complex subjects easier to comprehend.

Abstract Subjects. Subjects are abstract when listeners do not have direct access to them through their senses. Abstract subjects include ideas, intangible qualities of things, beliefs, and values. Subjects like *justice* or *courage,* for example, can pose special problems. Because such words are not anchored in concrete reality, people may see them

in different ways. We may agree that the object before us is a ‘59 Mustang convertible – here are its lights, its fenders, its hood ornament. But what are the objective, verifiable features of *fairness,* the interior of *honor?* As we talk about such subjects, we often struggle to share our perceptions. To overcome abstraction, remember the three R’s of language techniques: relationship, replacement, and representation.

One way to handle an abstraction is to show a relationship between the subject and some concrete object of comparison. For example, you might say, “His courage turned on and off like a faucet - first hot, then cold.” Here the abstract subject *courage* is related to the concrete object *faucet.* When words such as *like* or *as* are used to connect the abstract and concrete, or the obscure with the well known, the comparison is called a simile. Remember Scott Champlin’s simile, *Ii* a force that spun me around *like* a twisted yo-yo at the end of a string?” Hopefully, not many of us will ever be hit by a tracer bullet while parachuting, but helped by the simile, we can imagine the scene. Similarly, while few of us will ever be president, most of us might understand President Clinton’s frustration expressed in the humorous simile, “Being president is like running a cemetery; you’ve got a lot of people under you and nobody’s listening.”

Aristotle once warned that what you select fore comparison can either enhance or diminish a subject. An ill-advised simile can make your subject (and you!) seem ugly and tasteless. Some critics thought President Clinton was less effective when he suggested that stalling action on health care reform “will make it just like a hangnail or an ingrown toenail. It’s just going to get worse.” When they work well, vivid similes bring abstract or obscure subjects into the light.

Another technique for overcoming abstraction involves the replacement of expected words with unexpected words in the form of a metaphor. When you use a fresh metaphor, you pull a rabbit out of the linguistic hat. A listener’s first reaction is apt to be, “Wait a minute, words are not rabbits and language is not a hat.” But with a good metaphor, the next reaction is, “Ah, I see what she means!” Good metaphors reveal unexpected similarities in often dramatic ways. They substitute concrete words for abstractions and bring a subject into focus.

For these reasons, metaphor is perhaps our most useful and versatile linguistic tool. Because they invite listeners to explore unusual connections of ideas, good metaphors encourage the constructive listening we discussed in Chapter 3. They advance the informing, instructing function. In this book we have found it impossible to avoid them, especially as we have talked about the *climbing, building,* and *weaving* skills you acquire as you study public speaking. They also offer powerful help to the persuader, as, Jesse Jackson’s metaphor of the quilt demonstrated.

Because metaphors are so creative and involve an audience in the creation of meaning, they also work well in speeches of celebration. When Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke in Memphis the night before he was assassinated, he talked of the “spiritual journey” that his listeners had traveled. He said that he had climbed the mountain ahead of them - that he had “seen the Promised Land.” These metaphors of the journey, the mountain, and the grand view of the land beyond lifted his/listeners and allowed them to share his vision, just as he had earlier shared his “dream” with them in his famous “I Have a Dream”

speech. More than just communicating, such metaphors often allow us to share the soul of the speaker.

Because metaphors can be so powerful, you should select them carefully and use them with restraint. Mixing metaphors, combining images that don't fit well together, can confuse listeners and even create an inappropriate comic effect that reflects badly on the speaker's ethos. The speaker who intoned, "Let us *march forward* into the *seas* of prosperity," got a Iaugh he didn't want and hadn't intended. Finally, avoid trite similes and metaphors, such as "his idea is as dead as a doornail," "she has the courage of a lion," or "our team is on an emotional roller-coaster." Overuse has dimmed these comparisons until people are no longer affected by them. Such cliches can damage your ethos because tired comparisons can suggest a dull mind.

Complex Subjects. When subjects are very complex you cannot hope to describe them in their entirety. You must select words that focus on the essential character of the subject, or that emphasize those aspects that convey your point of view and encourage certain attitudes in your listeners. A synecdoche focuses on part of a subject as a representation of it. It stands for the subject, as in "The *tongue* is mightier than the *sword."* This synecdoche focuses on representative "parts" of the subject: the tongue as the essential producer of speech and the sword as a typical instrument of war. This seven-word sentence expresses in concrete form the complex idea that the power of speech is greater than the force of arms. *Movement* is an important synecdoche of our time, often used to characterize campaigns of social change such as the civil and human rights movements or the women's movement. This term focuses on the marching and demonstrating aspects of such campaigns to point up their activity and strength.

How Language Helps Us See : The Three R's and Their Techniques

1. Relating abstract subjects to concrete objects of comparison ("Her heart was as big as a Montana sky" – simile).
2. Replacing expected, abstract words with unexpected, concrete words ("You may think you're bright, but your bulb has burned out" – metaphor)
3. Representing complex subjects by focusing on selected features or associations ("There's blood on her hands" – synecdoche).

In addition to using synecdoche, speakers sometimes simplify complex issues by offering sharp moral contrasts, such as *good-evil* or *right-wrong.* Be careful when using such language, however, because this kind of simplification can invite distortion, creating an ethical problem. And be wary when you are a listener, and speakers try to move you by painting the world in black and white.

The verbal techniques based on relationship, replacement, and representation can help you share with listeners your perceptions of the world.

Resources that Help Arouse Feelings

As we noted in Chapter 3, words have two major types of meaning. The *denotative meaning* of a word is its dictionary definition or generally agreed upon objective usage. For example, the denotative definition of *alcohol* is "a colorless, volatile, flammable

liquid, obtained by the fermentation of sugars or starches, which is widely used as a solvent, drug base, explosive, or intoxicating beverage."12 How different this is from the two connotative definitions in the opening example of this chapter! *Connotative meaning* invests a subject with emotional coloration. Thus, the "intoxicating beverage" is no longer just a chemical substance but either "the poison scourge" or "the oil of conversation." Connotative language intensifies feelings, whereas denotative language encourages detachment.

Many of the techniques of language that help listeners see subjects can also arouse feelings. Simile and metaphor may kindle emotion by the relationships and similarities they suggest. Synecdoche can arouse by the focus it gives to a subject.

Other techniques, however, are especially suited to stimulate emotions. One such technique is the image with which you create a vivid word picture of your subject. Longinus called the image the natural language of the passions. Writing some two thousand years ago, this Roman rhetorician noted that images intensify feelings when "you think you see what you describe, and you place it before the eyes of your hearers." During the grim days of World War II, when London was bombed every night, the British people needed reassurance of their ability to prevail. Sir Winston Churchill advanced an image of hope for Britons in his frequent radio speeches. Note how he built the image on a metaphor of fire:

> What he [Hitler] has done is to kindle a fire in British hearts. . .
> which will glow long after all traces of the conflagration he
> has caused in London have been removed. He has lighted a
> fire which will burn with a steady and consuming flame until
> the last vestiges of Nazi tyranny have. been burnt out of Europe.14

Another useful technique to arouse feeling is onomatopoeia, the tendency of certain words, like *buzz* or *hiss,* to imitate through their sounds the object or action they signify. This technique often serves to heighten the emotional effect of imagery. Suppose you were trying to describe the desolate scene of multitudes of people fleeing from war and starvation. How could you bring that scene into focus for listeners who ate far away? We know now that a representative example can serve as the basis of a vivid image. So you might talk about an old man and his granddaughter,. the only survivors of their family, as they *trudge* wearily down a dusty road to nowhere.

The word "trudge" is an example of onomatopoeia. Its sound suggests the weary, discouraged walk of the survivors - we can almost breathe the dust disturbed by their steps. Onomatopoeia can bring us into a scene by allowing us to hear its noises, smell its odors, taste its flavors, or touch its surfaces. As it overcomes distance, it also arouses feeling.

Hyperbole, or purposeful exaggeration, may also arouse feelings. Speakers often use hyperbole to encourage action or force listeners to confront problems. Note the use of hyperbole in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s final speech:

> Men for years now have been talking about war and peace, but now no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer the choice between violence and nonviolence in this world, it's nonviolence or nonexistence. And in the human rights revolution, if something isn't done and done in a hurry to bring the colored

> peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed.15

Are the choices really that simple, the consequences that inescapable? Perhaps not, but King wanted his listeners to understand in their minds *and* hearts what would happen if they neglected their moral responsibility. His use of hyperbole was meant to make his audience think and feel simultaneously. As a speaker you should be careful when using hyperbole. The line between exaggerating and lying is all too easy to cross. Save hyperbole for those moments when it is vital for listeners to get your message.

A final technique that helps awaken feelings, especially when the subject is abstract, is personification. Personification involves treating inanimate subjects, such as ideas or institutions, as though they had human form or feeling. In the late spring of 1989, Chinese students demonstrating for freedom marched in Tiananmen Square carrying a statue they called the "Goddess of Liberty." They were borrowing a personification that has long been used in the Western world: the representation of liberty as a woman.16 When those students then had to confront tanks, and their oppressors destroyed the symbol of liberty, it was easy for many of us, living thousands of miles away in another culture, to feel righteous anger over their wrongs and to identify with their cause. Personification makes it easier to arouse feelings about people and values that might otherwise seem far away.

Both speakers and listeners must be careful in using and responding to the language of feeling. Appeals to feeling can be justified only when you are certain of the ethics of your cause. Such appeals can backfire, and destroy your ethos, if listeners believe you are trying to exploit their emotions. We should be equally careful, however, of euphemisms, words that numb our feelings by hiding rather than revealing reality. About a half century ago, the British writer George Orwell warned of a developing language of bureaucracy that can deaden our feelings. Sadly, this danger has materialized in our society. Thus, the medical establishment sometimes describes malpractice as a "therapeutic misadventure" and death as a "terminal episode." Government planners may try to dismiss destructive or costly policy blunders by admitting, "Mistakes were made."18 In such cases "mistakes" may vastly understate the blunder, and the passive construction, "were made," allows the speaker to avoid taking responsibility or assigning blame. Similarly, "friendly fire" means killing your own troops by mistake, and "collateral damage" means bombs hit civilian targets such as hospitals and schools. As Orwell noted, such language "falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details;"19 Your ethical goal must be to avoid extremes of language that arouse or block feeling without justification.

Resources. that Bring People Together

You can create a sense of togetherness by using inclusive pronouns, calling on special words, or evoking universal images.

Inclusive Pronouns. Successful speakers rarely refer to *my* feelings, *my* plans, or *my* cause, but rather *our* feelings, *our* plans, *our* cause. Similarly, they do not say that *I* will do something or *you* will do something, but that *we* will do it together. These inclusive pronouns help unite speakers and listeners. Their importance can be shown best by a negative example. When Ross Perot addressed an NAACP convention during the 1992

presidential campaign, he repeatedly referred to his African-American audience as “you people.” These words highlighted separation and alienated many listeners.

Special Words. Groups develop a set of special words or culturetypes that help specify and sustain their identity. Culturetypes express a group’s values and goals. They may do this by referring to its heroes and enemies.2O The rhetorical critic Richard Weaver called these words “god and devil terms.”2! He suggested that *progress* was the primary “god term” of American culture in the mid-twentieth century. When used in speeches, *progress* became a rallying cry. People were willing to do almost anything to achieve the benefits the word suggested. Other related god terms of the 1950s, according to Weaver, included science, *modern,* and *efficient.* Such expressions, he suggested, had unusual power because they were rooted in American values. On the other hand, words like *Communist* and un*American* were “devil terms.” Devil terms strengthen group ties by pointing out what we are not. Culturetypes can change over time. By the mid1970s words like *natural,* peace, and *communication* were emerging god terms; *liberal* and *pollution* were emerging devil terms.

Michael Calvin McGee, a rhetorical scholar at the University of Iowa, has written about ideographs, those special culturetypes that express a country’s basic political beliefs.22 He suggests that words such as *freedom, liberty, or democracy* are especially potent in our culture because they are tied to America’s political identity. Expressions like” *freedom* fighters” or *“democracy* in action” have unusual power because they use ideographs.

In addition to national culturetypes, you should also consider whether there may be special culturetypes that express group identity at your school and that might be effective with your classroom audience. In what does your school take pride? Who are its rivals and adversaries? The answers to these questions could alert you to special language that may help advance your purpose. One student at Indiana University strengthened her speech for blood donations by arguing: “Purdue students have done it - why can’t we?” Presumably, student speakers at Purdue University could use Indiana in the same culturetypal way.

Culturetypes add strength to a speech when used ethically. They remind us of our heritage, make us proud of who we are, and suggest that we must be true to that identity. They can weave the fabric of mythos, a powerful element of proof discussed in Chapter 14. However, because they are so potent, culturetypes lend themselves to abuse. To avoid problems, demonstrate how culturetypes apply to your topic and defend their relevance to your position. Respect those who may reject the invitation culturetypes offer into group identity. After all, another principle close to the American heart is that individual rights, especially the right to reject conventional values and lifestyles, must be preserved.

Universal Symbols. Some symbols draw on experiences that people share, no matter when *or* where they live. All of us, for example, may turn away from dark, dangerous places to seek the light. All of us may fear illness and seek to maintain health. Clearly, these basic impulses of attraction and avoidance are closely related to the human needs and motives discussed in Chapter 4. Just as clearly, because they are widely shared, these symbolic associations offer you an opportunity to appeal to people across cultural boundaries as well as touch them deeply. Whenever you are able to relate your topic to

these important points of symbolic experience - such as light and darkness, storms, the sea, disease and cure, war and peace, structures, the family, and space - you are making use of archetypal metaphor. A brief look at three of these metaphors demonstrates their potential power in communication.23

Light and Darkness. From the beginnings of time, people have made negative associations with darkness. The dark is cold, unfriendly, and dangerous. On the other hand, light brings warmth. and safety. It restores one's sense of control. When speakers use the light-darkness archetype, they usually equate problems or bad times with darkness and solutions or recovery with light. However, Wuer Kaixi, a leader of the Chinese freedom movement, used the image in a unique way. He expressed his horror over the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 by referring to a "black sun that rose on the day in June that should have belonged to a season of fresh flowers."24 If you can find such creative ways to use this traditional metaphor, your audience will listen with special appreciation.

Storms and the Sea. The storm metaphor is often used when describing catastrophes. Quite often the storm occurs at sea - a dangerous place under the best of conditions. The student speaker who argued that "our society is cut adrift - it has lost its moorings, and we don't see the dark cloud on our horizon" used these archetypes in combination to give dramatic expression to his fears of the future.

Disease and Cure. This archetypal metaphor reflects our fears of illness and our ongoing search for cures. The plague was the great symbolic disease of the past; more recently, cancer is the metaphoric illness that dominates public discourse.25 The speaker using such a metaphor usually offers a cure. If the disease has progressed too far, radical surgery may be the answer. On the night before he was assassinated, Dr. King warned that "the nation is sick, trouble is in the land, confusion all around." Only the commitment of his listeners to political, economic, and spiritual reform, he suggested, might cure that illness.

Similarly, metaphors of *war* and *peace* reflect our fascination with war and our yearning for peace.26 *Structural* images, as when we talk about "building" speeches or "laying the foundations" for the future, emphasize the human urge to create and control the conditions of our lives. *Family* metaphors often express the dream of a close, even loving relationship among people through such images as "the family of humanity."2? And *spatial* metaphors often reflect striving upward and forward toward goals and the desire to avoid falling or retreating into failure.

Culturetypes and archetypal metaphors can help you develop a speech that appeals to our need for togetherness and that sets the stage for group action. *Be careful /lot to overdo such language.* If you strain to use these metaphors, they will seem artificial. But if such language fits naturally, it can make your speech both unifying and dynamic.

Resources that Encourage Action

Taking action requires time and trouble and often involves cost and risk. Moreover, when we agree to act we often must place our trust in a leader, and leaders can disappoint us. Such barriers may make listeners reluctant to act, even when the need is urgent. There are language resources, however, that can help overcome audience inertia.

Many of the techniques that awaken feelings can also be used to encourage action. Hyperbole, imagery, and personification can picture the possible consequences of *not* acting. Synecdoche can focus our attention and prepare the way for action. For example, "We will win, not with muscle power, but with mind power" could be used to raise education as a national priority and to prepare listeners for changes in policy. Similarly, certain archetypal metaphors, most notably those that connect with illness or war, can prompt action, as when we urge listeners "to join the battle against AIDS" or "to fight the disease of war." Other language techniques that can spur an audience to action include alliteration, parallel construction, inversion, and antithesis. Because these techniques are also part of the language of leadership, they can enhance your ethos.

Alliteration. Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in closely connected words. One student speaker who criticized lowering educational standards summarized her position this way: "We don't need the *doctrine* of dumbing *down.* What we need are leaders who will strive for the educational stars." Her repetition of sounds was distinctive, and served to reinforce her ideas. Alliteration can be' very effective in the introductions and conclusions of action-oriented speeches. It can elevate the speaker in the eyes of listeners. But be careful not to overdo it - if used too frequently, it can distract listeners from your ideas or sound contrived. Save it for the moments that really count.

Parallel Construction. Parallel construction is the repetition of the same initial words in a sequence of phrases or sentences .We have already discussed this technique in Chapter 8 as a desirable way to word the main points within the overall5tructure of a speech. But parallel construction also works in conclusions when it puts the formal seal on thoughts developed in the speech. Senator Dan Coats of Indiana, speaking at the Stony Brook School following a discussion of the Holocaust, used parallel construction very effectively:

Hate is not dead. It does not even sleep.
We see it displayed in racism that finds new victims, and reopens old wounds.
We see it when a synagogue is desecrated.
We see it when a homosexual is attacked and beaten.
We saw it when flame touched tinder in Los Angeles and Asian shop keepers were assaulted in the riot.
We saw it in Florida when a murder was committed in the name of the pro-life cause.28

Inversion. Inversion changes the expected word order to make statements more memorable and emphatic. One student speaker concluded his message with a paraphrase of the poet John Donne: "Ask not for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for me. And it tolls for thee. For all of us who love the Bill of Rights, it tolls. II The "ask not II that begins this statement and the concluding sentence are both inverted from their usual order. The unusual order of the words gains attention and makes the statement distinctive.

Antithesis. Antithesis combines opposing ideas in the same or adjoining sentences so that listeners can see their choices clearly. Antithesis suggests that you have a clear grasp of options, an important requirement for leadership. One student used antithesis as she summarized her speech on educational reform:

The lack of funding does not cheat us as much as the lack of leadership. The root of our problem is not small budgets, but small people. Shake-speare put it well: “The fault is not in our stars but in ourselves.”

The following quotation from President Kennedy’s inaugural address is a famous example that interweaves antithesis, inversion, and parallel construction. See if you can identify these techniques at work together:

And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country.
My fellow citizens of the world: Ask not what Ame1-ica will do for you,
but what together we can do for the freedom of man.29

These language resources can help you use the power of the spoken word to promote good causes. Keep in mind, however, that this power can be abused as well as used. Learn to recognize these techniques so that you can resist their attractiveness when they serve less worthy motives.

USING LANGUAGE EFFECTIVELY

Rhetorical style is the unique way you choose and arrange words in a speech. Your rhetorical style reflects your individuality. Therefore, no one can tell you exactly how you should use language. However, there are certain standards for language usage you should strive to achieve whenever you communicate. We call these standards the six C’s of clarity, color, concreteness, correctness, conciseness, and cultural sensitivity.

The Six C’s of Effective Language Use

1. Strive for clarity by using familiar words in a simple, direct way.
2. Use colorful, vivid language to make your message memorable.
3. Develop concrete images so the audience can picture what you’re talking about.
4. Check the correctness of the words you use.
5. Be concise.
6. Be culturally sensitive: avoid stereotyping and racist or sexist language.

When you communicate We call these standards the six *C’s* of clarity, color, concreteness, correctness, conciseness, and cultural sensitivity.

Clarity

Clarity comes first on our list for good reason: unless you are clear, your speech will fail from the outset. This may seem obvious, but it is often ignored! Many speakers lapse into jargon, using technical language before an audience that doesn’t understand it. Technical vocabularies are necessary for specialized communication in many professions, but when speakers use these vocabularies with listeners who may not understand their meaning, problems are sure to arise. “Positive vortices adjective” may be a perfectly useful expression at a convention of meteorologists, but for general audiences “It’s going to rain” would be much better. Speakers who fall into the jargon trap forget the fine and trouble *they* had to spend to acquire a technical vocabulary, so they don’t bother to translate the unusual terms into lay language. Therefore they march happily forward into a jungle of unfamiliar verbiage, leaving their bewildered listeners lost behind them.

Closely related to jargon are words that are needlessly overblown. A notorious example occurred at the Barnum museum, when sign makers wanted to tell visitors how they could leave the building. Rather than a simple arrow with “Exit” over it, these wordsmiths came up with “To The Egress.” There’s no telling how many visitors left the museum by mistake, thinking that they were going to see that rare creature - a living, breathing *If* Egress.”

While misunderstandings may result from such innocent incompetence, at other times jargon can seem purposefully befuddling. Some speakers like to satisfy their egos and intimidate others by displaying their technical vocabularies. The parent of a student in Houston received a. n1essage from the high school principal regarding a special meeting on a proposed educational program. The message read:

Our school’s cross-graded, multiethnic, individualized learning program is designed to enhance the concept of an open-ended learning program with emphasis on a continuum of multiethnic, academically enriched learning, using the identified intellectually gifted child as the agent or director of his own learning. Major emphasis is on cross graded, multiethnic learning with the main objective being to learn respect for the uniqueness of a person.

The parent responded:

Dear Principal: I have a college degree, speak two foreign languages and know four Indian dialects. I’ve attended a number of county fairs and three goat roping, but I haven’t the faintest idea as to what you are talking about. Do you? [30]

While some people seem to take a strange joy in *not* communicating, others may try to hide the truth behind a smokescreen of techno babble that is closely related to the problem of euphemism we discussed earlier. Public television commentator Bill Movers warned his audience at the University of Texas against such dangers of jargon:

If you would. . . serve democracy well, you must first save the language. Save it from the jargon of insiders who talk ‘of the current budget debate in Washington as “mega policy choices between freeze feasible base lines.” (Sounds more like a baseball game played in the Arctic Circle.) Save it from the smokescreen artists, who speak of “revenue enhancement” and “tax-base erosion control” when they really mean a tax increase. . . . Save it .from . . . the official revisionists of reality, who say that the United’ States did not withdraw our troops from Lebanon, we merely “back loaded our augmentation personnel.”31

Fearing what might happen if audiences actually understood their meaning, such speakers attempt to hide behind cloudy technical language. In contrast, ethical speaking is clear and direct.

One way to achieve clarity is through amplification, in which you rephrase ideas to emphasize or clarify them. Providing important bits of information or examples that compare and contrast are other ways to amplify an idea. In effect, you tell listeners something, then you expand and repeat what you are saying. Observe the techniques of amplification at work in the following speech sample, in which each sentence expands and repeats the meaning of the sentence that precedes it:

The roadrunner is not just a cartoon character that makes a fool of Wile E. Coyote. It is a member of the cuckoo family and state bird of New Mexico. Still, the cartoon roadrunner and the real roadrunner have much in common. Both are incredibly fast, real roadrunners having been tracked at ground speeds over 15 miles per hour. Neither takes to the air to chase prey or escape a predator. Both look rather awkward as they run, with strides up to 20 inches long - a real feat for a bird that is only 24 inches long with over half its length in its tail.

Color

Color refers to the emotional intensity or vividness of language. Colorful words are memorable because they stand out in our minds. Those who use them also are remembered.

During the 1996 presidential primaries each of the contenders was searching for a way to capture the imagination of voters and to stand out from the pack. In such a contest, those who use language colorfully have an advantage. Patrick Buchanan moved from a long-shot candidate to a leading contender at least partially because of his skill with words. Early in the campaign, Steve Forbes gained a lot of attention through an advertising campaign in which he proposed a flat tax. Senator Phil Gramm, a candidate who later withdrew from the race, criticized Forbes on grounds that his plan would favor the wealthy by eliminating taxes on dividend and interest income. About the flat tax Gramm said, "I reject the idea that income derived from labor should be taxed and that income derived from capital should not."32

A nice use of contrast, but look how Buchanan expressed the same idea: "Under Forbes' plan, lounge lizards in Palm Beach would pay a lower tax rate than steelworkers in Youngstown." Later he added that Forbes' plat had been drawn up by "the boys down at the yacht basin." While Gramm's words are a study in abstraction, Buchanan's language is both colorful and concrete. The use of the animal metaphor, "lounge lizards," is striking. So is the use of contrast, setting the "lounge lizards" and the "boys down at the yacht basin" against the steelworkers, Palm Beach against Youngstown. It's sloth and privilege against character and virtue, and we know which side Buchanan is on. These colorful symbols reflected his commitment.

Colorful language can also create sensory images. We saw this technique at work in our earlier excerpt from the student speech about Janise Johnson: "[He] knows the loveliest, most sparkling springs. . . . He taught me . . . why the mist rises on a lake at night, how to make the best black

berry jam you ever tasted, and how to take care of baby wild rabbits. . . ." This speaker selected her images deliberately to awaken several of her listeners' senses - to make them "see" the mist, "taste" the jam, "feel" the rabbits' fur. She used adjectives sparingly but with striking pictorial result ("sparkling springs" - notice how the alliteration contributes to the pleasing effect). Adjectives should not be strewn about a speech extravagantly but saved so that they really count when you need them.

When you use colorful language effectively, your audience will find *you* to be colorful as well. Your ethos will rise as your listeners assign you high marks for competence and attractiveness. For all these reasons, color is an important standard as you develop your capacity to use language.

Concreteness. It is virtually impossible to discuss anything of significance without using some abstract words. However, if the language in your speech is overly abstract, listeners may lose interest. Moreover, because abstract language is more ambiguous than concrete language, a speech full of abstractions invites misunderstanding. Consider this continuum of terms describing a cat.

Editable is a/an

creature animal mammai cat Persian cat gray Persian cat abstract>
>concrete

A similar continuum can be applied to active verbs. If we wanted to describe how a person moves we could use any of the following terms:

Jennifer
moves walks
strides
abstract> --
>concrete

Again, the more concrete your language, the more pictorial and precise the information you can convey. Concrete words are also easier for listeners to remember. Therefore, your language should be as concrete as the subject permits.

Correctness

Nothing can damage your ethos more quickly than a glaring misuse of language. Mistakes in grammar or word selection can be disastrous because most audiences connect such errors with incompetence. They are likely to reason that anyone who misuses language can bordly offer good advice. When you select your words, be careful that they say exactly what you mean to say.

Occasionally beginning speakers, wishing to impress people with the size of their vocabularies, get caught up in the ((thesaurus syndrome." They will look up a simple word t6 find a synonym that sounds more impressive or sophisticated. What they may not realize is that the words shown as synonyms often have slightly different meanings. For example, the words ((disorganize" and ((derange" are sometimes listed as synonymous, yet their meanings are different enough that to use them interchangeably could cause serious problems. Just try referring to a disorganized person as deranged, and you will see what we mean. Use your dictionary when you have any doubts about word choice.

People often err when using words that sound similar. Such confusions are called **malapropisms,** after Mrs. Malaprop, a character in an eighteenth-century play by Richard Sheridan. She would say, "He is the very *pineapple* of politeness," when she meant *pinnacle.* Archie Bunker in *All In The Family* also was prone to malapropisms, such as ((Don't let your imagination run *rancid"* when he meant *rampant.* William J. Crocker of

Armidale College in New South Wales, Australia, collected the following malapropisms from student speeches in his classes:

A speaker can add interest to his talk with an *antidote.* [anecdote] Disagreements can arise from an unintended *conception.* [Indeed they can.

The speaker hopes to arouse *apathy* in his audience. [sympathy? empathy?]

Good language can be reinforced by good *gestation.* [gestures – but perhaps this relates to the conception mentioned above]

The speaker can use either an inductive or a *seductive* approach.33 deductive - but seductive can work too, especially when it creates a conception!]

Stw1ents are not the only ones who make such blunders. A reporter once praised an attorney for his ability to *dissemble* a bicycle. As a colleague observed with heavy irony, no doubt the man could *II* dissemble"; after all, he was a lawyer. But "dissemble" means to conceal facts, intentions, or feelings by talking around a point. What the unfortunate reporter was praising was the lawyer's ability to "disassemble" the bicycle.34 Elected officials are also not above an occasional malapropism. One former United States senator declared that he would oppose to his last ounce of energy any effort to build a "nuclear waste *suppository))* [repository] in his state.35 And a former mayor of Chicago once introduced Carl Sandburg as lithe poet *lariat* [laureate] of the United States."36

The lesson is clear. To avoid being unintentionally humorous, use a cur rent dictionary to check the meaning and pronunciation of any word you . feel uncertain about.

Conciseness

In discussing clarity we talked about the importance of amplification in speeches. Although it may seem contradictory, you must also be concise, even while you are amplifying your ideas. You must make your points quickly and efficiently. Follow the advice on speaking given by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to his son James: "Be sincere. . . be brief. . . be seated!"

Long, drawn-out speeches lose audience interest. They kill the impulse toward action in persuasive speeches. A concise speech helps listeners see more clearly and feel more powerfully.

To achieve conciseness, work for simple, direct expression. Thomas Jefferson once said, The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do." Use the active voice rather than the passive in your verbs: "We demand action" is more concise - and more direct, colorful, and clear - than" Action is demanded by us."

You can also be concise by using comparisons that reduce complex issues to the essentials. Sojourner Truth; a nineteenth-century human rights activist, once had to counter the argument that society should not educate African-Americans and women because of their alleged "inferiority." She destroyed that then-powerful position with a simple parable: "If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have a little half-measure full?,,37

The goal of conciseness encourages the use of maxims, those wise but compact sayings that summarize the beliefs of a people. During the Chinese freedom demonstrations of 1989, a sign carried by students in Tiananmen Square adapted the maxim of Patrick Henry, "Give Me Democracy or Give Me Death." Sadly, the Chinese authorities took them at their word. In Colorado, demonstrators at a nuclear plant carried a sign reading

"Hell No, We Won't Glow!," a variation on a chant often heard in anti-Vietnam war rallies of the 1960s, "Hell no, we won't go!"

As these examples suggest, maxims can have special power in attracting mass-media attention. When printed on signs, they satisfy the hunger of the press for visual messages. Their brevity makes them ideally suited to the rigid time constraints of television news. Of even greater importance, maxims evoke cultural memories and invite identifications When the Chinese students adapted the Patrick Henry maxim and displayed the goddess of liberty, they were in effect both declaring that they shared American values and appealing for our assistance in their desperate struggle. When their cause was crushed, many Americans felt the injustice in a personal way, and the resulting breach between the Chinese government and our own remains to this day.

Maxims serve well within speeches when they focus the message in a compact, memorable statement. Just remember, they cannot substitute for careful, well-supported arguments. Once you have developed a responsible and substantive speech, consider how you might use maxims to reinforce your message.

Cultural Sensitivity

Respect for the power of words reveals how language can lift and unite or wound and hurt different members of your audience. This respect develops into cultural sensitivity. If you read the historic writings on human communication, you will find little about cultural sensitivity. The ancient Greeks, for example, worried only about speaking to other male Athenians who were "free men" and citizens. Only in today's world with its emphasis on empowering a wide spectrum of cultures, lifestyles, and races and its pursuit of gender equity, has cultural sensitivity emerged as an important standard for effective language usage.

As we noted in Chapter 4, there is a very high probability that your classroom audience will represent different cultures. As listeners, they may be very sensitive to any negative allusions or clumsy efforts of speakers to identify with folkways that aren't their own. Campaigning for the presidential nomination in his native Southern region in 1992, Bill Clinton was comfortable using such folksy expressions as "my opponents are squealing like a pig caught under a gate." Speaking in Georgia in the same campaign, however, Senator Bob Kerrey from Nebraska, was less adept. At Atlanta's Spelman College, Kerrey decreed that if Clinton got the nomination, Bush would open him up "Re a soft peanut." Kerrey's listeners looked at each other with puzzled faces. Someone must have spoken with his speechwriters, because in later speeches in that peanut-producing area Kerrey changed the expression to "boiled peanut. "38 The lesson seems clear: don't try to be what you're not, or you may look ridiculous.

A lack of cultural sensitivity almost always has negative consequences. At best, audience members may be mildly offended; at worst, they will be irate enough to reject both you and your message. Cultural sensitivity begins with being attuned to the diversity of your audience, appreciative of the differences between cultural groups, and careful about the words you choose when referring to those who may be different from you. Although you must make some generalizations about your audience, avoid getting caught up in stereotypes that suggest that one group is inferior in any way to another. Stay away from racial, ethnic, religious, or gender-based humor and avoid any expressions that might be

interpreted as racist or sexist. (See - the Speaker's Notes in Chapter 4, p. 121, for Guidelines on Avoiding Racist and Sexist Language.)

IN SUMMARY

Many of us underestimate the power of our words. The language we select can determine whether we succeed or fail as communicators.

The Power of the Spoken Word. Oral language is more spontaneous, less formal, and more interactive than written communication. The spoken word is more expansive, alters the structure of sentences, and depends more on the cadence or rhythm of language as it is voiced.

Words can shape our perceptions. They invite us to see and share the world from the speaker's point of view. Words can also distort reality and block certain ways of seeing. Words can arouse intense feeling by overcoming the barriers of time, distance, and audience apathy. The spoken word can bring listeners together in a common identity. Finally, words can prompt us to action.

Language Resources. Speakers utilize certain techniques to activate the power of language. To help audiences see your point of view, *simile* can clarify abstract subjects by showing their *relationship* to things more concrete and familiar. *Metaphor* offers new perspectives by following the principle of *replacement,* surprising audiences with unexpected uses of words. *Synecdoche* helps simplify complex subjects by *representation,* focusing on essential, strategic features or associations.

To arouse feelings, use words that activate connotative meanings. The *image* creates a stimulating word-picture. *Onomatopoeia* uses words that mime the subjects they refer to. *Hyperbole* uses exaggeration to overcome audience lethargy and kindle powerful feelings. *Personification* attributes human qualities to abstractions or impersonal institutions.

To bring listeners together, use inclusive pronouns such as "our" and "we." You can also use a special vocabulary of symbols. *Culture types* express and invoke the values of a group or society, and *archetypal metaphors* remind us of our common heritage as human beings. When properly used, such techniques as *alliteration, parallel construction, inversion,* and *antithesis* can enhance appeals for action.

Using Language Effectively. *Rhetorical style* is the unique way you choose and arrange words. Although style varies with the user and with different topics, audiences, and situations, you should strive to satisfy the six standards of *clarity, color, concreteness, correctness, conciseness,* and *cultural sensitivity.* Clear language is simple and direct and draws its comparisons from everyday life. Amplification promotes clarity by dwelling on important, difficult points.

Color refers to the emotional intensity and vividness of language and is especially vital to the sharing of feeling. The more concrete a word, the more specific the information it conveys. Correctness is vital to ethos because grammatical errors and improper word choices can lower perceptions of your competence. *Malapropisms,* confusions among words based on similarities of sound, can be very damaging. Concise speakers strive for brevity, often using comparisons that reduce complex issues to the essentials. *Maxims* are

the ultimate in conciseness. *Cultural sensitivity* demands that a speaker be aware of the diversity within an audience and respectful and appreciative of cultural differences.

TERMS TO KNOW

simile
metaphor
synecdoche
onomatopoeia
image
hyperbole
personification
Euphemism
culturetype
ideograph
alliteration
parallel construction
inversion
euphemism
rhetorical style
jargon
amplification
malapropism
maxim
cultural sensitivity

DISCUSSION

1. The example that opens this chapter. presents arguments for and against whiskey, using connotative language. Rephrase these arguments, using denotative language. How does this change affect the power of the appeals? Which speech situations call for more denotative speech? How can connotative words be misused? Under what circumstances are they most appropriate?
2. In the 1950s, Richard Weaver suggested that *progress* was the primary culture type of American society. What words would you nominate as culturetypes in contemporary society? Why? How are they used now in public communication? Find and share examples from speeches, essays, editorials, cartoons, or advertisements.
3. Look for examples of the use and abuse of specific language techniques in public communication. Report in class and explain why and how they work.
4. Analyze how you used the power of language in your last speech. What, if any, barriers to perception *or* feeling did you have to overcome, and what techniques did you use? Could you have improved the effectiveness of your language? How?

APPLICATION

1. Use archetypal metaphors to describe the following abstract concepts: friendship
   freedom
   justice
   brotherhood
   democracy
   poverty
   opportunity
   Present your descriptions in class. Which work most effectively and why?
2. Study the language used in a contemporary political speech. How is the power of language exercised? What special techniques are used? Evaluate the effectiveness of this usage according to the standards discussed here.
3. Using published pamphlets and speeches, choose one of the following social/political movements and determine its heroes and villains: antiabortion, civil rights, contract-with-America, environmental, gay rights, and women's liberation. How well does the

language of these pamphlets or speeches satisfy the standards of the “six C’s”: clarity, color, concreteness, correctness, conciseness, and cultural sensitivity?

4. To explore and help develop stylistic techniques, your instructor will assign different language techniques to members of the class and then present a subject. Your task will be to make a statement about this subject using the technique *you* have been assigned. Share these statements in class. Try this exercise several times, using different subjects and different techniques of language. Evaluate in class what this exercise reveals about the spoken word.
5. Identify and discuss the language techniques used by Elie Wiesel in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Appendix B. What techniques were used to reawaken group identity? Did they work for you? Why to why not?